

THE
PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH CENTRE

50 GLOUCESTER PLACE
LONDON, W.1.



GROUP WORK



May, 1947

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THE THEOSOPHICAL RESEARCH CENTRE (ENGLAND)

This introductory note is written to explain the origin of the English Theosophical Research Centre, to tell what it is, to whom it is responsible and something of the work it sets out to do.

In the year 1925 Dr. Annie Besant, then the president of the Theosophical Society, with Dr. Arundale, and others, took the necessary steps to found a Theosophical World University. Educational ideals for children had been widely propagated through the Theosophical Educational Trust and the closely allied New Educational Fellowship. The foremost standards of national and international education were fostered and the New Education Fellowship is still actively carrying on this work to-day.

The ideals of the Theosophical World University were set forth clearly from the beginning twenty years ago. They were and are based on the vital need for the introduction of theosophical inspiration and understanding into every branch of human study and research. For some years after the foundation Dr. J. H. Cousins in India carried on work in its name at Adyar and Professor J. E. Marcault held several courses under the auspices of the University in London. These courses were directed towards bringing the occult way of life to bear on any and all subjects of concern to humanity.

However, it was recognised, at an early stage that the handicap of such a seemingly grandiose title would be serious, with so little in evidence of substantial material assets. A decision was therefore taken not to use the title for public purposes, though the legal form and name of the World University was of course retained for its future worth. Certain funds in fact were already invested on its behalf and its legal standing is necessary also to enable it to receive donations and legacies. It has a yearly formal meeting and an International Council.

The Theosophical World University exists, therefore, as a properly constituted body ; but for the time being it delegates its educational work to Research Centres attached to the National Societies of the Theosophical Society.

The first Research Centre to be so authorised was associated with the Theosophical Society in England, and it is hoped that similar Centres or Lodges, if Centres are not within a National Society's rules, may be formed in many countries. The Theosophical World University, acting through its appointed Council, can and does place part of its income at the disposal of Research Centres, for publishing transactions and for other special purposes.

The Theosophical Research Centre (England) is an English group of students and research workers organised under the Theosophical Society in England. It has been in existence since 1934 and has maintained various study and research groups, and has successfully published several books and many pamphlets. These are the product of groups under which its activities are pursued, each one meeting for the study of its particular subject.

The Research Centre holds meetings for various purposes. There are occasional public meetings, open to invited guests and to members of the Society, at which some well known speaker addresses the audience on a matter of interest to Theosophical students. Then there are general meetings for members, usually for business purposes, or again, to listen to an address of special importance. The chief work however is done in study groups, which are of three kinds :—

- (1) General educational groups open to any person interested in the subject chosen. These classes deal with the application of theosophical principles to subjects such as science, comparative religion, psychology, healing, etc., and are meant to arouse interest in deeper aspects of Theosophical teachings, and to educate members for further research.
- (2) Qualified members may join certain groups of students, to discuss special topics of mutual concern. At present there is a general science group at work, a psychology group, and a group of therapists studying the etheric body, and one studying symbology. Others are formed from time to time.

(3) The third type of study group is a small closed research unit, consisting of qualified members who wish to work together on some special problem, who are selected by a leader or by fellow workers because of special fitness for the task in hand. Most of the transactions published by the English Research Centre have been the result of this type.

At the present time, both in the Society and in the world at large, group work is undoubtedly useful. Modern science, religion, philosophy and art have a different outlook and are presenting to the world very different views from those dominant, both east and west, when *the Secret Doctrine* was first published. The Society is in need of students who, already familiar with the fundamental teachings, will pursue them further, to deeper and richer levels, and then apply them, with insight, to the literature and the discoveries and problems of the day. The objects of the Theosophical Research Centre (England) are printed below. As the aftermath of the war dies away, the International Council of the World University hopes that opportunities will arise to make contacts with Theosophical students in many countries.

The articles on group study that follow in this pamphlet indicate some of the problems met with and which need to be overcome, as well as some of the methods used in groups of the various types. We hope that they will stimulate interest in the formation of small and large discussion groups for study in Lodges, and possibly a few research units at the Headquarters of some Sections. Students are cordially invited to apply for further particulars to the Secretary of the World University, care of The Theosophical Society, 50, Gloucester Place, London, W.1., England.

All who are familiar with the basic teachings of Theosophy can in such group work pursue their study, and carry those teachings further, while co-relating them to present day views. Groups of this character, working in cordial sympathy and impersonally, foster intuitive enlightenment and may well hope to illumine with their common sense occultism many a subject of current study and research.

E. L. GARDNER,

March, 1947.

RESEARCH AND GROUP STUDY.

by

DOROTHY ASHTON, B.SC.

The fundamental truths of Theosophy are spiritual and remain valid down the centuries. But they are not static or final and their presentation must vary, as the veil is lifted a little more, and as the thought and science of the day open new concepts and terminology in which to frame them. We have to study the eternal message of Theosophy, test it out, in our lives, correlate it with modern knowledge, and present it to the world, in the form most helpful to the needs of the times.

Methods and technique in studying and handling this kind of knowledge must vary not only from time to time, but according to the immediate purpose and the people to be reached. There are three main divisions of our work in presenting Theosophy to the world :

- (1) The study of the basic truths and their presentation to the public in suitable terms.
- (2) The study of the more hidden teachings, their deeper applications, and their correlation with modern thought.
- (3) Research work, experimental or physic.

Let us examine the appropriate methods for each of these.

As regards the first of these three, a Master has given the hint : " That we must popularise Theosophy, so that it seeps into the public consciousness and affects the general level of thought and morals." This is the general propaganda work of the Society—the sheer routine work, which must go on continuously by means of lectures, classes, books and pamphlets—but mainly by lectures. There is no other way for this side of the work. The spoken word has a certain power and the didactic method is characteristic of the fifth race. This is true whether we are concerned with a large public lecture or a small enquirer's group. Discussion groups are becoming more general but they do not take the place of the lectures.

This general work of educating the public in 'basic' Theosophy must go on quietly and continuously, yet not be

pushed or over-advertised. We have to make the knowledge accessible, but we do not proselytise. Leadbeater has said that we have till 1975 to get it over, for by that time what he calls 'esotericism' (divinity of man, karma, reincarnation and simple yoga) must be generally accepted in the world. Interest in psychism and yoga is very widespread even now, but it is often of the highly coloured variety. Our lecturers need themselves to be well informed about psychic matters, recent psychical research work, etc., although there is no need to adopt specific psychical research terminology. The chief point is to make clear the distinction between psychic activities and spirituality. Lecturers need to be careful in their use of all scientific terms. They should try to illustrate the basic teachings with modern examples, and apply these same teachings to problems of modern life.

We have to emphasize in all this, that psychism and spirituality are not synonymous.

But behind all this is the deeper side of Theosophy that forms the second of the divisions of Theosophical work. Madame Blavatsky gave openly to the West, the hitherto concealed knowledge of the plan, the laws and forces of nature, the existence of hierarchies of evolving beings, etc., formerly only taught in secret, in the Mystery Schools. The Society is a custodian of this knowledge, to guard it down the centuries, to study and correlate it with science and psychology to formulate it in terms for the needs of the times. Science and Psychology have gone further than we tend to realise. "Science," says the Master K.H. "is our best ally," and I venture to suggest that this does not mean stretching science to fit Theosophy, or vice versa, or pointing out that Madame Blavatsky discovered this or that 50 years ago (though we can usefully do this on occasion), but rather that science gives us a way or technique of thought, an approach to knowledge and a manner of regarding relationships, equally useful for material or occult matters.

Much of this deeper knowledge of the laws of nature, evolution and the powers latent in man, lies in the three volumes of the Secret Doctrine. It has been said that it will take us 200 years to understand this fully. Few people can expound the Secret Doctrine and the student must usually dig for

himself, or better still make a combined effort with other students. Every Lodge should have an advanced Theosophical or Secret Doctrine Class. Group study is the method most likely to develop the necessary intuition—and group work is the way of the future and very much a sixth race method. A group of people co-operating on occult study or work becomes a dynamic living unit and ceases to be a set of mere individuals—that is, it can do this if the members are capable of forgetting self and sharing effort and knowledge in an impersonal manner. Then the group touches a higher level than that usually reached by any of its members and comprehension is deepened. It is like the Zen Buddhist, who can only solve his mental paradox by rising above it to the intuitional level.

I have elsewhere defined a Lodge as “a group of members of all grades welded into a living whole whose vitality and energy is greater than that of its component parts.” A lodge is, however, usually a composite group containing smaller units (classes, committees, study groups, etc.), and it is the latter (the working units) with which we are now concerned. A normally active lodge may well have a small group for enquirers, the membership of which constantly changes; sometimes an elementary group for newly joined members; and a general study group for older F.T.S. The Lodge as a whole may do a certain amount of valuable group discussion work but by its very nature it lacks the continuity and clarity of a specialised group. It has of course other functions than study, for the life which plays through it is the life of the Society itself.

For an advanced study class on the Secret Doctrine, or for comparative study of religion, philosophy, or some aspect of science or psychology and Theosophy, a group of about 7 to 10 has been found by experience to be best. This should meet regularly once a week, fortnight or month as the case may be,—the point is to keep the rhythm. Such a group takes a few meetings to settle down. Those members who are not really interested will soon fall out for some apparent trivial reason. When the remaining nucleus has adjusted itself to its job, it is usually better that no new members should be admitted; in some way the group becomes an entity and new-comers break the atmosphere. It should not

be assembled too casually either—some mixtures of members just won't work. For really serious study it is best to pick a set of people who are reasonably of a level in culture and ability—not in knowledge, in which they may be complementary—but in power to handle ideas and to be articulate on them, and to search the literature and summarise results. Also those who are to tackle any comparative Theosophical study should have the necessary background of 'basic' Theosophy, i.e. : should not have to waste time in group over the very elementary things.

There is *no* leader in this kind of work, though the presence in the group, or in contact by correspondence, of a senior student, in an advisory capacity, can help a lot. There is however, a place in the Society and its Lodges for those teachers who can give of their superior knowledge to a class, but that is not the technique we are dealing with here.

Though there is no leader in group work, some one, or each in turn, must act as chairman to see that all the members have a chance to contribute to the discussion and that the line of thought is kept, but he is only the servant of the group and must not abuse his position to dictate or to do too much talking. If a permanent record or transaction is to result from the work, someone (possibly the chairman) should summarise the result of each meeting's work and read this record for the group's approval at the next meeting.

If a study group of this kind meets in the lodge premises, it should be in comfortable informal conditions in a classroom—not on hard chairs before a platform. Such a group met in the NorthWest area once a fortnight during the black-out years, at the house of one of its members, where our hostess gave us a roaring fire, comfortable chairs and that feeling of gracious welcome and ease which broke down inhibitions or barriers of shyness, thus assisting members to express themselves freely. This particular group began with meditation (which co-ordinates the group and sets the atmosphere quickly) and ended with tea and cakes and general conversation. We usually did about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours serious work and then relaxed over tea before dispersing. This group certainly developed a potent life of its own, and for three years its members did not miss a meeting except for sickness.

The field of study should be limited, and when the group has done its job, whether in a few months or years, it should break up, even if all or part of it reassemble later for another phase of work on a fresh subject.

A group may decide each time on the subject of the next meeting, but for serious Theosophical study, a definite plan or scheme of study is essential, to state the terms of reference and to limit the field of operations to something that can be within the limits of the group's capacity. This scheme should have main and subsidiary headings and perhaps indicate possible sources of information and it can be modified somewhat as the group proceeds. It is here that a senior student can advise and suggest sources and books and methods of approach, without imposing any authority. Choose a subsection or heading of the scheme of study for each meeting and complete work on it, if possible; one or two members being responsible for looking up references, assembling information, diagrams and ideas for the group to discuss and digest. In due course, all take part in bringing material and in discussing it, and finally the group as such approves the record. It must be emphasised here that group work means pooling ideas and knowledge from *all* points of view, not just debating for and against, and not just listening to those who seem to know most. And the group should not carry any passenger members who merely want to listen.

Although a group of this kind may seem to be inward turned, it has a very definite effect at the mental level and plays its part in experience as well as spreading Theosophical knowledge. Leadbeater has pointed out that thought at this level, always has educational value, for it rises above the chaos of ordinary personal thought, to a level (or wave length ?) where there is little competition and thus it shines out unimpeded as a searchlight in a dark world.

Research may be the correlation of certain aspects of Theosophy with modern thought or science, or it may mean actual experimental work under controlled conditions, such as recent work on telepathy, and statistical consideration of results. But it may also cover observation of physical or superphysical phenomena by a psychic, or collaboration between an ordinary scientist and a trained psychic, in work on say healing, occult chemistry, or natures finer forces. Again it might mean

checking historical data by observation of the akashic records. Whatever the object and however specialised the technique, the small group is probably the best means of carrying on this kind of work. For critical study, discussion and correlation of science and Theosophy the method and size of group (say up to a dozen) already described will be best, but for actual experimental and observation work—physical or super-physical—the group should be very small (not more than four or five probably) and consist of trained experts, whether in ordinary scientific qualifications or as occult students. This kind of work needs a very high degree of impersonal detachment, discrimination, as well as definite ‘specialist’ qualifications. In spite of a real desire to work together, temperament may make co-operation between scientist and psychic-observer difficult, but if a group achieves true co-operation and becomes ‘alive’ these and other obstacles are transcended.

In the future much of our real long-term Theosophical research work (and training of the necessary students) will take place under ideal conditions in great residential university centres. Here the student will be able to study occultism and modern science together; here, too, scientific investigation and clairvoyant observation may go side by side and experimental work on the effect of colour, sounds and perfumes, for example, be carried out, and work on the inner side of all nature’s kingdoms. As the Master K.H. has said most emphatically that the Theosophical Society “is not just a college for occultists, but a fraternity,” these great centres will be communities, large groups where that quality of brotherhood which cannot be taught but only lived, may be expressed. It will no doubt be some centuries yet before there is a full flowering of this side of the Society’s work—decades perhaps even to a real beginning. But that is no reason why we should not use our imagination as to the future, and even now we can see how the Theosophical Research Centre prepares the way. Summer Schools too, can be preliminary experiments in this direction where for a time at least communal living, study, and meditation under pleasant conditions and with the help of older students brings a true group consciousness. Within this larger group, classes may meet daily for a few weeks and experiment in group study, discussion and research.

9/2/47.

GROUP STUDY: SOME SUGGESTIONS.

by

LAURENCE J. BENDIT, M.D.

One of the problems of the student of Theosophy today is whether the system of thought which we know by that name—*i.e.*, a Westernised Twentieth Century version of the basic Vedantic philosophy which underlies every religion—is a progressive and unfolding thing. Or has it become a form of revealed truth to which nothing more can be added, and which cannot therefore be kept up to date? Some think this is so, and even that nothing later than H. P. Blavatsky's writings is worthy of consideration. But this is surely wrong because it goes directly against the very teachings of H.P.B. She restated the fundamental truths about the universe, as contained in occult lore, truths which cannot be varied because they must endure while the Cosmos endures. But in these teachings she showed that, as man's mind and consciousness develop, so must his apprehension of these truths change parallel with that development. Thus, to make *any* statement of spiritual truth into a dogma is to deny one of the most important tenets of that statement, which is that man has powers latent in himself which enable him to discover and experience these things for himself. It is true that, until one has become a real Seer and Knower, the method is one of trial and error—mostly error, no doubt. But no person can himself become a Seer unless he is willing both to try, and to make mistakes, so that the quicker the aspirant to Wisdom begins to do this, the quicker he reaches that goal.

One of the troubles about getting to work and exploring the unknown world, is, however, an attitude which either exalts man's thinking to such a degree that there is no place for anything beyond thought, or else one which is unduly humble in believing that transcendental things are for ever beyond the reach of the ordinary individual. The materialistic scientist is an example of the first, and he thereby places an obstacle of his own creation in his path. The timid religionist is an example of the other kind, and he blocks his path because he will not allow himself to realise and use his own powers.

One can however, confidently assert that direct experience of things is possible, even to the mediocre, if they set to work in the right way. To do this, needs an alert mentality, a willingness to find that one's ideas are wrong, and to drop a theory found faulty at any moment ; and especially the ability to get together and to work with others who are bent on the same quest for knowledge. If one can do this, and feel some confidence in oneself as a Son of Mind even though scarcely born as yet, one can make an adventure of study, rather than a dreary toil, and thereby reap a rich reward.

In other words, failing the presence among us of the giants, we can still make discoveries, and, by our studies, enlarge the field of Theosophy both for ourselves and others. It is no use our sitting still and regretting that H. P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater and others have gone from among us. On the contrary, the very fact that they have gone, should encourage us, now, to go ahead and to realize—if we have any faith in the Powers that be—that we are beyond the spoon-feeding stage, and that we both can and must begin to feed ourselves.

To do this, there is no need for explicit psychism, still less for mediumship. Everybody is psychic, though in many cases this is unconscious or latent. And in fact, psychism can be a barrier rather than a help to understanding, because it is apt to lure the seeker into the mirages of the "astral" world—the world of illusion *par excellence*—rather than bring one face to face with realities. True, psychism in its right place is an asset, but it can only be in its right place when it is subservient to an alert and critical mind, not the ruler of a woolly one. Anyhow, there are other ways of searching for truth, which do not call for clairvoyance or psychometric power, as such, and which are every bit as effective.

Research does not necessarily mean the discovery of new basic truths. There is nothing new under the sun and it is probable that all the basic truths about the universe have been given to us already, in one form or another, in the Scriptural writings of our humanity, and in the still older mystery teaching which underlies and precedes them all. What can be done however, is to discover new angles from which these truths may be seen, aligning them perhaps with the experience and knowledge of

our own life and times. There is a great deal of difference between learning and repeating by rote what others have seen and said, and the kind of vivid experience which the members of an active group can obtain for themselves, even about matters quite beyond their ordinary reach. The lecturer who repeats what others have said does useful work. But the one who speaks of what he himself knows, makes a different impression on the audience even if he is far less scholarly, because what he says is alive and not embalmed. People nowadays are quick to sense and appreciate the difference between second-hand and first-hand knowledge.

For the ordinary person, work in a group is probably the most useful method of approach, and this for two reasons.

The first and most obvious one is that one person alone is easily led astray by his own personal bias. In discussing his ideas with others, flaws and distortions are more likely to be laid bare.

The second, however, has to do with a subtler aspect of things, which is the ability of the individual mind to merge itself temporarily into a greater entity, the group mind. We are reminded here of the Gospel saying that "Where two or three are gathered together" for a certain good purpose, there is something added to that gathering. There is also the biological view that where a number of lesser entities are grouped into a greater one, Life makes that larger entity something more than the sum of the little ones added together. That is, a simple animal made up of two hundred individual cells, becomes, in terms of biology, something more than those two hundred cells would be if they lived alone. Moreover, each individual cell, by its participation in the greater life, becomes more than it would be by itself. In this case, the cell is the individual aura which, properly "grouped" becomes different from that of the lone person working on his own.

We do not as yet know a very great deal about this ability to create mental groups. But we do know that suitable technique can help to create them—for better or for worse. The worse is seen in mobs and angry or panic-stricken crowds. The Nazis had evolved a most impressive technique for welding human beings into groups on the negative side,

reducing them from the level of civilised man to that of savage animal-men more destructive and dangerous than natural wild animals because of the human element in them.

But the converse also holds true, and those who have been at certain gathering, such as those at the Star Camps at Ommen before the war, must have experienced those occasional moments of real union and enlightenment which took place there. These experiences were quite different from mass-hysteria or mass-hypnosis, because in them individual awareness was heightened, not diminished. As one who was there pointed out, it was a moment of intense feeling without emotion, but, on the contrary, deep stillness, silence and peace, which left one somehow changed. These were large gatherings of hundreds of people, under rather special conditions. But a group can consist of as few as two people—a husband and wife, or two friends discussing seriously between themselves, or the therapeutic “group” of psychologist and patient. In any of these, for creative results, the same essentials are required.

First, there must be common purpose. When people meet to defend their own point of view rather than to find common ground, the result is an argument or even a quarrel. In psychic terms, we have, not fusion into a common field, but a hardening of the aura of each one, and consequently a clash. There is no rapport between them, no bridge-mechanism for give-and-take, and so, nothing positive is accomplished. If, on the other hand, each person comes with a truly open mind, not with an axe to grind, nor to show off his own dialectic skill and cleverness, nor with a desire to demolish some one else's argument, then a common field becomes established, and into this something can flow, so to speak, out of another dimension. The rigid-minded ; the person with prejudices (*i.e.*, with opinions based on emotional bias, no matter how reasonable they may be made to seem) ; the one who is convinced that he is right and others wrong ; the one who feels a proprietary right over some concept or discovery ; the one who forgets the group in his enthusiasm over some one point ; none of these are helpful to group work.

On the other hand, if one such disturbing element be in a group, right handling by the rest of those present may

willy-nilly make that person melt and become incorporated in the general aura. But this can only be done if sufficient people have the correct attitude of open-mindedness with an objective and impersonal approach to what is being discussed.

It is important that we understand what open-mindedness means. For to be open-minded does not mean to be soft and without opinions. It does, however, mean that one is willing to listen without emotional resistance, hostility or dislike, to what others have to say. It also means that one does not feel any wish to force one's own views on others—because if one does, it means that one is not sure that these views are right, and yet that one is unwilling, for more or less conscious emotional reasons, to let them change. Paradoxically, the person who *really* knows about the deeper things of life is never dogmatic, and is so secure in the fundamentals of what he knows that he is always open to new approaches to the same problem, and moreover, enjoys and appreciates the need to expand his own ideas on it. In this way he adds to his apprehension of something which he knows *implicitly* as a whole, but can only know *explicitly* in part.

Thus, non-resistance, objectivity, *vairagya*, *wu-wei*; the attitude of open acceptance is required. But so is *viveka*, discrimination; that is, careful scrutiny and analysis, but not criticism, in that criticism means analysis plus an emotional bias of a rejective or destructive kind. Open-mindedness and alertness of mind are not incompatibles, as may be thought at first sight, but complementaries, and they are indispensable to research, whether in groups or by oneself.

It sometimes happens that a psychic group forms itself spontaneously. Thus, on one occasion, a number of people were sitting in committee, dealing with matters of finance and routine such as are the lot of committees. Questions of study cropped up, and somebody said, "Yes, we are told that man reincarnates. But *what exactly is it* that reincarnates?" Whereupon another person threw out a suggestion about this, from a rather unusual angle. In a few moments the committee found itself playing ball with the idea and realising that here, indeed, was an old subject which could be studied in an entirely new way. The committee had to resume its formal business. But the few minutes of creative discussion made

several people feel "This is too good to drop," so a separate group was formed which set to work to continue discussion of the subject—and very interesting it proved.

On another occasion, a number of students were sitting round the tea-table and began discussing a difficult point of psychology when, rather unexpectedly, the whole group seemed to become in a subtle way fused and the discussion became extremely suggestive and vital. On this occasion, there was one person present who, though very intelligent, was inward-turned and absorbed by a difficult personal problem. It was very noticeable that, while the remainder "grouped" this one person was left out and did not participate in any way in what was going on.

These examples may suggest that a group is a negative thing—somewhat akin to spiritualistic circles "sitting for development" or the group which sits passively waiting for "guidance." It was, in fact, quite otherwise, and arose out of vivid and active discussion, with a natural heightening of perception and understanding, not the reverse. Nor were there any strange phenomena. On the contrary, what took place was something perceptible only to the sensitive and psychically aware.

The difference between negative and positive grouping seems to depend upon the mind. Where the mind is vague, confused, unconcentrated, then the group atmosphere sags. But where there is clear and vigorous thought; or at least, where there are enough mentally active people in the group, then if fusion takes place, it will tend to swing on to a higher, rather than a lower mental level. This is because MANAS is, as it were, the pivotal point in the humanity of this time. The very word "man" is derived from "manas," and the Leader of mankind is the Manu.

As H. P. Blavatsky writes in *the Secret Doctrine*, the power to think is the keynote of man, throughout this age at least. In view of the tendency in some circles to decry the use of mind in Theosophical study, it is important that we should understand its function in this and other progressive work. It is *not* true that "Mind is the great slayer of the Real" until it has played its role—which is the role of the hard case round a bud, the shell round an egg, the chrysalis round an

embryonic butterfly. It is only after *manas* has been developed, used, and mastered, that it becomes a menace, if it is allowed to become the tyrant, not the servant, of the Self.

For the first role of *manas*, in its lower reaches, is to separate and individualise, while self-awareness or self-consciousness develop in the individualising entity. It thus breaks up the original group-soul and the tendency to revert to this, in primitive man. But if, later on, its pattern does not change, even when it begins to include the activity of Higher Manas, or Buddhi-Manas, then the result is increasing individualism, egoism and self-assertion. One sees something of this in certain self-styled scientific circles, where each one is bent on arguing his special point of view, and, as a result, cohesion into a group would be quite impossible even it were desired.

One must learn to use the lower *manas* to think clearly, to make one's thought-forms and concepts—even on simple matters—clear-edged, without making them rigid. Then if one is animated by the desire to know more, and more deeply, a study-group will naturally tend to draw down into the conscious mind knowledge hitherto unconscious, from the level of Higher or Buddhi-Manas.

So far we have considered general principles in group work. The question now is, how does one set about practising them? In answering it, the matter of special cases, such as the psycho-therapeutic relationship can be left out. It will also be assumed that enough has been suggested already to make obvious what is needed for constructive talking between husband and wife, or friends who have difficulties to put right between themselves. We will therefore confine ourselves to groups meeting for study and discussion of impersonal problems.

Such groups can be large or small. But for close and deep study, a small one is probably best, although one can learn much that is of interest in a large one too.

The group which set to work to study re-incarnation and Karma has already been mentioned. In this case, it consisted of some half-dozen people, carefully chosen for their mental orientation. That is, they were people so familiar with these ideas that they had become part of their mental fabric; they had lived with them for years, and there was nothing new or strange about them. However, they liked one another, and there was no feeling of rivalry or resentment among them. It was easy, therefore, to work together, and moreover, to *disagree* if one felt that a point was not correctly stated. In such a case, the one disagreed with, would accept the fact that he might be wrong, and set to work to collaborate with the others to find the right answer. In deciding on personnel, the few original members chose their own co-workers, not from any sense of being exclusive or superior, but simply from the viewpoint of inviting a few people to come, who would step easily into the rhythm of the rest. It did not mean that everybody had to be at every group meeting, but that a solid core of the same people met each time. Quite certainly other people were equally or better qualified to do the same study. But it seemed desirable to keep a group of this intensive kind small, and human beings being what they are, it seemed also that it was best to allow for the purely personal element to come into the selection.

In theory, it is true, personal differences should be negligible before a greater purpose, but in practice they are very much apt to crop up. Thus, in one group, one member was extremely critical of the private life of another person, and the atmosphere was constantly destroyed by an uprush of critical personal feeling—even though it might be unvoiced. On a different occasion, while a group seemed to be working well, two members got at odds, and one lost her temper. This effectively finished all work for that session, although a well-established group may be the stronger for having dealt effectively with such a crisis.

Personalities are particularly important and crop up especially easily in a small group. In a large group they are less in evidence, and so, though the work is less intensive, it is in some ways easier. Thus one Lodge, having an average attendance of forty to fifty, decided to experiment in this way.

A subject would be chosen (*e.g.* "Tradition and Experience," "Self-Awareness," "Psychism") and a member appointed for the task would start with a short lecture of 15-20 minutes, after which the matter would be thrown to the Lodge for discussion. The most fruitful way of doing this was for the originator to be provocative, and especially if he could finish with a question mark: "Now, here is a thing I am not clear about. Have any of you any views about it?" In this particular Lodge, the discussion at first was between some six or eight only. Often there was one person, not always the one who had the most useful contribution to make, who had a great deal to say—and whom the chairman or leader had to check. But gradually, as the members got used to the idea, the number of people who had constructive suggestions seemed to grow, until after a year, some fifty per cent. of those present might be taking part. On enquiry, it was found that the new experimental meetings were appreciated at least as much as the very best lectures on ordinary lines, and better than the less good ones, because members felt that this was something of their own and in which they could take part, even if they did not feel they could give a full-grown lecture.

This suggests a somewhat arbitrary, though essential division of groups into two kinds. There is that which is composed of experts or advanced students in a particular subject, and this is capable of deep specialised study. Thus, "Some Unrecognised Factors in Medicine" was produced by a small number of doctors and practising therapists. It could not have come out of a large mixed group of less trained people, and those who did it were thoroughly versed in the ordinary knowledge of their profession. It is essential for this kind of work that the subject, under scrutiny should be mental currency to those taking part, with nothing strange or unfamiliar in it. This enables the group to carry the study further and deeper into more original channels than would otherwise be the case.

Larger groups are usually more mixed, and can without detriment, contain many beginners; people who have some inkling of the subject, but who are not necessarily experts. One *must*, however, have at least one or two members who have sufficient knowledge and experience to be able really to lead

the discussion. Naturally the more there are of these the better the results. But one thing must be avoided, which is a more or less conscious division of the group into an elite of experts ; as against a class of learners. In a real group *nobody* must be made to feel inferior nor allow himself to feel superior ; all are learners, even the experts ; while all can, if they take the trouble find something at some moment which they can contribute. Only so can the group hold together.

Naturally, the discussion must be free and informal—no standing up, or strict rules. But at the same time, private conversation in a corner, or “ back-chat ” between two people has to be checked. This brings up the need for a chairman or leader. Even in a small group, it is essential that somebody should take charge, to keep discussion on the subject, to see that each person gets fair play and the chance to give his views, to stop the irrelevant or the person who is too vocal, and so on. The chairman need not necessarily be the same all along. In fact, it is a good thing to change frequently. But it needs practice to lead a group—and excellent it is—because one has to learn to feel one’s way, not to cramp the meeting, and yet not to let it drift or stampede. This is difficult, because, at times, an apparent side-track in reality leads to an important aspect of the subject under discussion, while at times, if it is allowed to go too far, it kills the group atmosphere entirely. At the end of the meeting, it is good if the leader can draw the discussion together, very briefly. This should not be on the lines of “ Mr. X said so and so, Mrs. Y said something else, and Miss Z then added another thing ”—but rather, “ It seems that out of our discussion the following general principles emerge ”

It is an important part of the leader’s function to know when to stop. For, at our present stage of evolution, we are not capable of creating a group at will, still less of maintaining it in activity until we choose to let it resolve. The time during which a collective aura can be held depends upon how concentrated the work is, how well directed, how well harmonized the members, and especially on how soon they become tired. Also, upon whether any person drags in an irrelevancy, or in any other way upsets the balance of the structure which has been built up.

It is the leader's task to be alert to the moment when the atmosphere peculiar to the group ceases to exist, and he should then conclude the meeting. If he does not, then the discussion loses its sharpness and goes to pieces, people become bored, odd conversation springs up in corners, and so on. Whether this happens early or late, it must be accepted, as it is usually hopeless to try and recapture what has gone. True, there may be a momentary faltering, and after a few minutes the machine gets going again. But when the wheels have really stopped going round, it is no use trying to start them again at that meeting.

Thus, a group meeting may last a longer or a shorter time. In one particular intensive group thirty to forty minutes was usually all that its members could hold. In a Lodge, an hour, more or less, is enough, while where there is a pre-arranged structure and procedure, as in a piece of ritual, an hour-and-a-half, or at the very maximum, two hours, is as much as the average group can take. There may, it is true, be some who can enjoy themselves for much longer. But this is a very different thing from active group work. It should never be forgotten that what matters in such cases, is not one's own pleasure, but whether that group or Lodge is working or merely drifting through the set stages of a ceremony no matter how beautiful.

Another important person in the group is the scribe. This may or may not be the same person as the group leader. If it is intended that the work done be written up, his job is to note all positive points as they crop up, and afterwards to shape and sort them. It often helps to focus the group if there is a definite object in view, such as to produce a printed transaction. For group work needs both an origin and a goal. The origin is to know what subject one wants to discuss—as it is obviously useless to sit down and hope that something interesting will turn up. The purpose of discussion—to produce a book or an article—then gives a point towards which to aim. The scribe, who knows what is required of him can select from his notes, the material which fits in with that aim, leaving aside, whatever would make the subject unduly complex, and obscure the main line of argument. It is not that the side issues are unimportant or irrelevant,

in fact, there may be enough material there to start the group on another paper, related to the first. Thus one group studying re-incarnation and karma provided the scribe with suggestions for further work on the constitution of man and his bodies, as well as for a paper on the general application of scientific principles such as Newton's Laws, the law of entropy, etc., across the various kingdoms of nature and the planes of the Solar System.

These notes are somewhat inconclusive. For one thing, no mention has been made of the possibility that Devic influences may work through a group. This is *at least* very probable, and in valid ceremonial work, an intrinsic part of the proceedings. But if people think too much of whether such angelic help is or is not present, they are likely, not only to forget their human job, but, even if they do not become sentimental or rhapsodic, they may, with their minds, interfere with what the Deva has to do. So it is probably better to leave this aspect out of our discussion, and stick to practical human politics. What has been said, is however, based on experiment and experience, and the object of this paper is to suggest that others too should try out these methods. They are very much in tune with the times, and, if as the astrologers tell us, we are at the threshold of the Aquarian Age, we are coming to the time of corporate work, not so much of individuals alone. Already groups of all kinds, good, bad and indifferent, political, religious, social, are springing up everywhere. But it is only as we learn to understand the mechanism of the group, that we shall find out how to use it effectively, and how to correct things when they go wrong. For this, however, many experiments are required, and much careful analysis and scrutiny.

But in such work *all* can help. We may be very mediocre people, but this is the age of the Little Man, rather than of the Titan, and it is of great importance to the Little Man to feel that he too can do something worth while, and to know that it is his own. Group Study may not produce another *Secret Doctrine*, or precipitate a spiritual renaissance in the world. But if it does nothing more, it is immensely stimulating and interesting to those taking part in it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The Student who wants to study this matter further is referred to books on social psychology and the herd instinct, *e.g.*, W. Trotter's "Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War," and Le Bon's "The Crowd." Also to an excellent pamphlet "Hints on Methods of Study," published by T.P.H.

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